ART THERAPY AND ART EDUCATION - A DEFINITION

Report on a Conference

On January 24, 1982 a conference was held at Concordia's Visual Arts Building that developed out of a need to define the role of the art educator and the art therapist. It was organized by a group of students in the Faculty of Fine Arts, aiming to promote a dialogue between the Art Education and the Art Therapy Programmes.

Guest lecturers representing the respective fields were; George Russel and Lee Kozlik, art educators, and Beth Robinson and Michael Edwards, art therapists. They presented their methods, objectives, preoccupations, and shared some of their personal feelings and beliefs concerning their careers.

There was the opportunity to meet these speakers, as they spent the entire day at the university and had a friendly exchange with the students. To reach a more integrated view, a panel discussion ended the day which allowed interaction between the participants on specific issues such as the importance of meaning in art, theories on interpertation - the focus of psychology or aesthetics, the type of framework each participant preferred to use to meet their objectives.

The original objective of a definition of clear cut roles may not have been reached, yet as the moderator Stan Horner commented, different models were presented. These served to give insight into approaches and goals, as all had credibility, while differing in points of view.

The discussion revealed how difficult it is to remain on either side of the fence, whether or not one is trained to do so. Lee Kozlik felt she was not trained to do art therapy, but gave great importance

to the self as the source to tap through dialogue for the inspiration of her students. Beth Robinson, who focused on art therapy and mental health, also manifested some purely aesthetic artistic interest and spoke of clients who have developed into artists through therapy. George Russel, who claims that he is not looking for psychological meaning, but aims at the exploration of art for art's sake, seems to have set up an approach which reaches a dual objective when one looks at the imagery of his students. However, George disclaimed direct responsibility for the mental health of his students in relation to their image making. Michael Edwards gave a historical account which showed that in earlier days of art education, art therapy was included in its concerns and became separated from it as it focused on objectives more closely related to the field of education. He also defined the different approaches to art therapy, one approach stemming from the use of art as an adjunct in treatment and the other where art itself was the healing process.

By the end of the day, students and teachers attending found meeting points between art education and art therapy, as well as a clearer definition of the distinctive goals of each field. Art therapy's objectives include helping clients towards better mental health, while art teachers work towards the awareness of art in culture and the development of personal image making.

The overall success of this one day conference, the first of its kind, is an example for future endeavor. Many thanks to those who participated in the organization and financial support of this event.

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